

Festuneting & Festunets : Examples from Buddhist texts

by DEWnada Sept. 22, 2019

festoon: [origin: 17th century French, from the Late Latin *festo*, a festal garland]
noun - an ornament (such as a garland of flowers, chain of leaves, or ribbons) hung in a curve formation as a decoration, hanging from two tacked points.
verb - to decorate with ornaments hanging loosely from two tacked spots; to decorate or embellish in general.

C.S. Lewis' ***festooning***: In "Letters to Malcolm", numbers 3 & 4, Lewis explains his festooning form of prayer in which he adds personal thought associations or requests to lines of the Lord's Prayer. For example, embellishing the line "as we forgive those who trespass against us", one could name and reflect upon how you need to forgive certain people for specific offenses.

D.E. Wachter's ***festuneting***: taking a text (the ornament) and tacking the opening & closing syllables, words or phrases together, strung together with an ellipsis (3 breaths or just a pause) placed in between them, thus forming a mantra or prayer for use in meditation/contemplation.

Festunet: a mantra created from the process of festuneting.

The mystical idea behind this festuneting form of prayer is that all of the meanings and potencies of the entire text are contained within first and last portions. What follows are some examples of festuneting in a Buddhist context.

One could join the two beginning words of ***The Heart Sutra*** with the two concluding words, taking 3 breaths in between, one for each of the 3 Jewels:

"Arya Avalokiteshvaro ... bodhi svaha"

[Noble Avalokiteshvara ... Awakening, So Be It!]

Let's make a festunet for ***The Dhammapada***. The first word is the mouthful "Manopunnangamma", so we can just use the first two syllables, "Mano". And the last word is "Bramanaj". So one festunet for ***The Dhammapada*** could be:

"Mano ... Bramanaj"

[Mind (of) ... a Brahmin/one most elevated in Holiness & Realization].

Now the word one will normally encounter in Buddhist sutras, after the title and invocation, is “evam”. So to create a festunet we can use “evam” and join it to the syllable, word or phrase which concludes a specific sutra. *[Note: The “ti” or “iti” found in sutra closings is a quotation ending marker and not a word itself. Also, one normally finds a colophon stating something like “This concludes the sutra titled such and such”.]*

All but one Pali sutta, *The Itivuttaka Sutta*, begin with the formula “Evam me sutam ekam samayam”. Most Mahayana sutras begin with this same formula, just rendered in a different language. The Sanskrit form is “Evam maya srutam ekasmin samaye”. Usually this phrase is translated into English as “Thus have I heard at one time”.

I will be focusing on the first word “evam”, but in passing I do wish to mention the word “ekam”. Given that Bright Dawn is a school of Oneness Buddhism, the word “ekam” is a potent word to chew upon, as it means “One”. This is a sacred word in Vedic traditions, but also within Jewish tradition and its offshoots. The central prayer of Judaism, the Shema, concludes with the word “echad” meaning “one”, a direct cognate to the Pali and Sanskrit term “eka/ekam”. We could therefore interpret the phrase, “Evam me sutam ekam” to mean: “Thus[ness], heard by me, the One”.

Let me turn now to deeper reflection upon “evam”, the key opening term of nearly all discourses of the Buddha. Evam is usually translated as “thus” but could also be translated as “such”. Within some Mahayana schools this term “evam” is actually considered to refer to the 10 Suchnesses or 10 Thusnesses. In Chinese the term is translated as rushi, and in Japanese translated as nyoze.

The book *Light of Wisdom* by Padmasambhava & Jamgon Kongtrul has this to say about “evam”:

So, according to the hidden meaning, "wisdom" is the support, the syllable E of primordial great emptiness. "Essence" is the supported, the VAM syllable of great bliss...

E and VAM are the union (dbyer med) of bliss and emptiness, emptiness and compassion, and of means and knowledge. Since the coemergent wisdom of the omniscience of all the buddhas abides in the magical display of the union of these two syllables of means and knowledge, the E syllable of great emptiness and VAM syllable of great bliss, the syllables E and VAM are fully explained during the opening chapter at the beginning of teaching the profound and extensive aspects of the sacred Dharma...

*The Vajra Garland [aka The Exposition Tantra of Guhyasamaja] adds:
E is emptiness, it is taught.
Likewise, VAM is compassion.
The bindu results from their union.
This union is the supreme marvel
Embracing these 84,000 Dharma teachings.
In short, this is the seal of the Dharma.*

In a Western context, “evam” could be seen as invoking the Source of Life, as the meaning of the word Eva/Eve is “life” or “living”. And the Greek cognate word for Eve is Hebe, who is the ever youthful (prime of life) form of Hera, Queen of the Gods. Hebe carries the cup which is filled with the ambrosia, which grants the deities eternal life.

Now, turning to a festoonAZ example which uses the term “evam”, let’s look at ***The Shorter Sutra on Amida Buddha*** (aka *The Shorter Sukhavativyuha Sutra*). Here we can create the following festunet:

“Evam ... Abhyanandan” [Thus ... rejoicing back/into bliss]

Let me conclude this Dharma Glimpse by considering the first words spoken by Shkayamuni Buddha after his enlightenment and the last words spoken during his embodiment.

Shakyamuni first words after attaining Nirvana, as recorded in *Dhammapada* 153 & 154 were:

*anekajatisamsaram sandhavissam anibbisam
gahakarakam gavesanto dukkha jati punappunam*

*gahakaraka dittho'si puna geham na kahasi
sabba te phasuka bhagga gahakutam visavkhatam
visavkharagatam cittam tanhanam khayam ajjhaga*

*Through many rounds of rebirth have I ran, looking for the house-builder,
but not finding him. Painful is repeated rebirth.*

*Oh, house-builder, you are seen! You will not build this house again!
All your ribs are broken; the roof is destroyed.
My mind is dissolute; I have attained the end of all cravings.*

The Buddha's last words were spoken before dying are recounted in *The Mahaparinibbana Sutta*:

vayadhamma sankhara appamadena sampadetha

Experience is disappointing; through vigilance you succeed.

So Shakyamuni's first syllable after attaining Nirvana was **an** (not) [from the full word aneka = not one/many]

And Shakyamuni's last syllable before attaining Parinirvana was **tha** [from the full word sampādetha = you (plural) succeed/prosper]

“an ... tha”

[breathe/live ... an auspicious prayer]

[Note: “an” has a few possible meanings, as it can be used as a negation but can also mean to breathe or to live; “tha” has many possible meanings, including: an auspicious prayer, a mountain, a protector, preservation, a loud noise, the moon's disk, a cypher, a place frequented by all]

If we combine “an” & “tha” to create one word we get “antha”. In the Vedic language of Kannada “antha” means “end”, based upon the Sanskrit term “anta”.

In a Western context “antha” means “flowery blossom”, being short for Antheia, a byname for the goddess Hera.

So ponder this. The Buddha's first spoken sound after Enlightenment and his last spoken sound before physical death was the Ah sound. Within many spiritual traditions this vowel sound is considered to be the source of All. Within the Tibetan Dzogchen tradition one is taught to meditate upon a white letter A within a sphere of rainbow light. And within the Japanese Shingon tradition one meditates upon the letter A resting upon a lotus flower within a white full moon disk. This is the sound of one's natural being, one's breathing in and breathing out. What wonder:

“Aha”



